



Daily Bread

The Belarusian agricultural industry ensures national food security

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The food issue is becoming one of the biggest contemporary challenges in the world, in some places verging on the brink of a food crisis. In the Republic of Belarus, there has been developed a theory and methodology of food security which make allowances for the specificities of the country; a strategy has been designed which helps use the domestic potential and benefits of the international division of labour in a rational way.

The government food strategy is geared toward providing food security as an essential underpinning of sovereignty, economic and social stability. It suggests an optimal combination of political, economic, social, cultural, psychological and other factors to address this issue. For Belarus, food security is key to national independence and to maintaining favourable national and regional food trends.

It is also pivotal for ensuring that the national agricultural industry is export-oriented.



The geographical position of Belarus makes Belarusian climate conditions less favourable for agriculture than those in most other European countries. The main factors here include temperature, precipitation and sunlight intensity and spectrum. However, the wise national agricultural policy, considerable government support for agricultural producers, advanced agricultural science and the diligence of the Belarusian people make the Belarusian agricultural industry highly efficient.

The criteria for ensuring national food security and ways of fulfilling them were first laid down in 2004 and identified by the Government in its National Food Security Concept. These criteria were based on the understanding of the essence of food security and resource potential.

As a member of the system of international agriculture, the Republic of Belarus acts strictly in compliance with international

agreements in agriculture. The basic features of the Belarusian agricultural sector, which originate from the specificities of the domestic natural resources, the country's agricultural potential and mentality of the Belarusian people, can be described as follows:

1. Belarus is a country with high food consumption (3,000-3,100 kcal per person per day) and high availability of food to the population.

2. With an advanced manufacturing industry, Belarus has considerable land and labour resources in rural areas and well-developed agricultural industry. Accounting for 0.17% of the world's population, Belarus produces 6% of all flax produced in the world, 2.8% of potatoes, 0.9% of milk, 0.6% of sugar beet, 0.3% of meat in dead-weight and 0.24% of wheat produced worldwide.

3. One of the features of the Belarusian agricultural industry is that most of the production is con-

centrated in cattle breeding (over 80% of pork and 100% of eggs and poultry are produced at agricultural complexes, most of milk and cattle meat agricultural complexes and large farms). It helps implement modern-day technologies, advance the cattle breeding industry that accounts for more than 60% of all revenues earned in the Belarusian agricultural sector and sets the entire Belarusian agriculture on an innovative track.

4. The volume of production of all types of foodstuffs exceeds the domestic demand. Essential for ensuring national security are such products as grain, flax fibre, sugar, vegetable oil, dairy and meat products, potato, vegetables, fruits, berries, eggs. The following figures show average consumption of particular foodstuffs over several years per one Belarusian as against the accepted medical standards: meat 86%, milk 65%, eggs 94%, fish 92%, sugar 103%, vegetable oil 120%, vegetables 114%, fruits 73%, potato 111%,



Every year grain yield grows larger. President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko visits agricultural company Oktyabr-Grodno (Grodno region)



specific climate conditions necessitate steady imports in international trade relations while as well, making sure that Belarusian products are competitive enough. According to estimates made by Belarusian economists and agricultural experts, a balance of food enough to ensure food security and optimal export ranges as follows: domestic production between 80% to 85%, imports between 15% to 20% and exports between 15% to 20%.

Production growth in Belarus has helped stabilise the domestic food market (the share of imports in the over food consumption in Belarus does not exceed 20%; the main export items are fish and exotic fruits). The country has been boosting food exports continuously. In 2007, the exports approached \$2 billion. Belarus' major food exports are milk and dairy products (2.5 million tonnes), meat and meat products (140,000 tonnes), potatoes, flax, vegetables, rye flour and other foodstuffs. Unfortunately, the country's great export potential with respect to potatoes

bread 89%. Obvious is a negative trend in milk consumption. Not enough milk is consumed, although the volume of dairy products in the market is enough for ensuring an appropriate consumption level; and dairy products, in terms of their price, are affordable for all social groups. The reason for the downtrend is a change in consumer preferences toward aggressively advertised

juices and beverages. There is a need for explanatory work and effective advertising to promote healthy life style to reverse the downtrend.

5. As far as all major agricultural goods are concerned, their production is export-oriented. Belarus has been steadily expanding the export of its food and other agricultural products. But the geographic position and

Per capita production and consumption of staple foodstuffs in the Republic of Belarus

Foodstuff	Production (kg)		Consumption (kg)		
	2006	2007	Recommended medical standards	Out-turn	
				2006	2007
Bread and bakery	609 (grain)	744	105	93	92
Potatoes	856	901	170	187	188
Vegetables, melons and gourds	223	222	124	134	138
Fruits and berries	74	44	78	59	58
Sugar	83	68	33	36.1	34.2
Vegetable oil	4.2	5.1	13.2	14.1	15.7
Meat and meat products	79	84	80	67	70
Milk and dairy products	606	609	393	254	250
Eggs	343	333	294	276	275
Fish	1.5	1.9	18.2	17.4	17.5

Footnote: the production and consumption data for 2007 are preliminary, for 2006 updated.

In 2006 the per capita food consumption was 875.7 kilos, or 3,100 kilocalories a day, which was below the standard of 3,600 kilocalories. This meets the third food security level (all in all, there are four levels). This means that food resources are enough to ensure a stable though unbalanced diet.



Agrolink's incubator breeds around 0.8 million chickens every month

and vegetables has been under-used so far.

6. The Republic of Belarus has a well-developed agricultural machinery industry; the absolute majority of technological operations are performed with the help of indigenous technical means. A line-up of farm machines including sophisticated equipment such as tractors, grain and fodder harvesters are exported to dozens of countries including to the American continent.

7. Over the course of history the Belarusians have developed the mentality of the rural population predisposed to collective land use. This trace of the Belarusian mentality was noted by Prime Minister of the Imperial Russia F.A. Stolypin in his speech at the State Duma.

Belarus is ranked quite high in the world rating of agricultural producers. In the agricultural industry the country is now dealing with the same problems facing other transition economies. The ultimate goal is to improve the wellbeing of the nation, optimise consumption patterns, promote demographic development, provide health protection.

In ensuring food security it is also important that production of agricultural raw materials and food should be underpinned by sustainable development of the national agricultural industry. The strategic goals of the government agricultural policy are to maintain food provision to the population at a level sufficient for a healthy diet, to make food available to all social groups of the population and to protect the interests of national agricultural producers. The state ensures food security by creating

a combination of economic and social conditions to both promote the growth of agriculture and the entire food industry and to ensure sustainable social and economic development of the country.

The Belarusian model of the agro-industrial complex relies on three agricultural industry development programmes. Each of them pursues clear-cut objectives from stabilization of the industry during the severe crisis that followed the Soviet Union collapse to building up the production capacities and strengthening the agricultural sector as a whole.

The national programme aimed at reforming the agricultural industry of the Republic of Belarus (main areas) was designed for 1996-2000. It identified the main reforms and priority measures to promote efficient development of the agricultural production. The programme described the main approaches to gradual transition to a market system which combined market principles and government regulation of some issues.

The transition to market economy was ensured by means of reforming kolkhozes and sovkhoses to make them competitive in the new economic environment, converting processing companies into joint stock companies, creating rival economic entities. The programme was aimed to introduce government and private owner-



Modern grain cleaning and drying plant of Tolochin Tinned Food Plant (Vitebsk oblast)



ship in land relations. The main form of the use of land is leasing from the state.

Considerable changes were introduced into the economic mechanism of the agricultural industry. First of all these were the setting up of the national and regional funds of state support of commodity producers, leasing out machines and equipment, streamlining taxation system. The supply/demand principles were introduced into the system of price formation. Another goal was to eliminate the disparity of prices for farm produce and industrial goods. The government retained its control functions in the agrarian production.

The domestic agricultural industry embarked on another stage in development as the agricultural industry development programme of the Republic of Belarus for 2001-2005 was adopted. Further advancement in the agricultural production came through the organisational efforts and technological upgrading.

The fundamental principles of this programme include state ownership of agricultural land, large scale manufacturing, diversified economy, integration of agricultural industry on the macro level – horizontal and vertical cooperation (from the production of raw materials to the marketing of the final products), improvement of the intrafarm relations and payment system based on commercial principles. A paramount importance was attached to the greater state support of the agricultural industry with a view to allocating up to 15% of the consolidated budget to the agricultural industry.

The implementation of the programme resulted in greater investment in the agricultural industry which allowed to streamline the technologies in both plant and animal production and to renovate the technical facilities of the national agriculture. The land-use management was optimized. The number of enterprises processing animal production was

adjusted to the amount of the raw materials available. The status of the agricultural enterprises was brought in line with the requirements of the Civil Code of the Republic of Belarus. Cooperative agricultural organizations with different forms of ownership were set up at collective farms. The measures introduced within the framework of the programme helped to fully satisfy the domestic agricultural needs and build up a significant export potential as early as by 2004. The number of unprofitable agricultural companies sank more than 6 times in comparison with 2003. When the goals of the agricultural buildup were achieved, the strategy of the agricultural development had to

ties. The main points of this goal are to bring the agricultural management in line with the requirements of the market economy tailored to the national needs, to adjust the agricultural specialization to the natural environment and the current world demand, to integrate the agricultural industry using cooperation principles, to raise the efficiency of the state support of the agricultural industry, to step up innovation activities in agriculture, to develop social structure of the rural communities.

This programme offers brand-new solutions to the agricultural development challenges. It covers a comprehensive set of measures to address social issues of rural



be modified with the consideration of the national experience, domestic and foreign expertise and scientific recommendations.

This is why the State Programme of Rural Revival and Development for 2005 – 2010 set an objective to strengthen the Belarusian agricultural industry and by doing so to solve the social problems of the rural communi-

ties, to improve the life quality and work conditions of the rural population through the establishment of the new type of agricultural settlements – agrotowns. 1481 agrotowns are to be set up. Higher salaries and better social security will help preserve rural lifestyle and make it more attractive which in its turn will give a boost to the human resource-

Modern milking house of Olgovskoye company (Vitebsk region)



es market and raise the efficiency of the production.

Some Br27 trillion (in the prices of 2005) is to be allocated for the implementation of the 2005-2010 programme. Taking into consideration the funds of the enterprises and bank loans (the bulk of the programme is to be realized through shared financing), Br70 billion will be needed for this purpose. It is a record high investment in the rural development.

In 2005-2010, the state is to help agricultural enterprises purchase 18,000 tractors, 8600 grain harvesters, 2300 fodder choppers and other agricultural machinery and equipment.

In line with the programme, by 2010 the grain production is to amount to 8.4 million tonnes, sugar beet 3.8 million tonnes, potatoes 9 million tonnes, milk 6.5 million tonnes, animal and poultry meat more than 1.4 million tonnes. This production level is meant to ensure the food security of the country. The export potential of the agricultural production is to reach \$2.7-3 billion.

Belarus is supposed to export around 700,000 tonnes of grain, 600,000 tonnes of potato, 130,000 tonnes of sugar, 180,000 tonnes of meat and meat products, 2.7 million tonnes of milk and dairy products.

Thanks to the implementation of the three programmes the

modern agriculture and adjacent industries, which constitute Belarus' agribusiness, can be characterised as a market formation with a high-degree of targeted state regulation for the sake of steadily operating markets of agricultural raw materials, food and production resources.

Belarus' agriculture is focused on developing large-scale production, which benefits are proven by domestic and foreign experience. State ownership dominates agricultural lands leased by agricultural producers. Private lands are allocated to individuals for personal subsidiary plots, collective gardening, construction of houses and household outbuildings. Other economic entities such as state companies, cooperatives and farmers are also widespread. The government recognises all of them as equal.

The legal base required for foreign investments into the national agribusiness has been created. The amount of attracted investments grows every year. The money is primarily channelled into setting up new production facilities and upgrading existing enterprises.

Measures are taken step by step to perfect the specialisation of branches of the national agriculture. Priority is granted to increasing the effectiveness of land resources, beefing up the manu-

facturing of animal products at large dairy farms and livestock industry enterprises: 96 facilities meant to raise cattle, 106 piggeries and 62 poultry factories.

The amount of equipment used in agriculture is rising. In 2005-2007 Belarusian agricultural companies acquired 7,040 tractors, 531 till-plant outfits, 1,620 fertiliser applicators, 4,338 grain harvesters, 1,131 forage harvesters, and other agricultural machines. Reconstruction has been completed at 751 dairy farms, 60 piggeries, 58 cattle farms and 52 poultry factories. Technological approaches to arable farming and livestock farming are being improved. Measures are taken to restore the meliorative net. By 2014 this work on meliorated lands, which constitute one third of farming lands, is supposed to be completed.

Grain production has been stabilised at 7-8 million tonnes, sugar beet – 3.5-4 million tonnes, oil rape-seed – 0.5 million tonnes. For the first time in Belarus the annual milk yield averaged 4.1 tonnes per cow in 2007.

Despite the obvious positive changes in Belarusian agriculture further intensification ways are sought. These processes take place as part of the evolutionary development of the agriculture in view of stable macroeconomic regulators on the basis of measured decisions, an innovation-based science-driven development paradigm. The effectiveness of the Belarusian agriculture is improved through taking social, political, economic, scientific, technical, organisational, informational and other measures developed by the national government and regional authorities.

Future technological remodeling of the industry, cooperation and integration of agricultural economic entities, better manufacturing and economic ties between them, perfection of management and financial support for manufacturing processes as well as better encouragement of high-performance work are viewed as major reserves. ■

Agro-town Khalch grows larger and better in the Vetka region, Gomel oblast, which was affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe



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In the photo: Igor Kononchuk, Babushkina Krynka Director (on the left) Valery Koreshkov, Chairman of the State Standardization Committee of the Republic of Belarus (on the right), at a certificate award ceremony

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